

GLOBAL TEACHER PRIZE 2020 FINALIST

Teacher Sam to continue helping Orang Asli kids

KUANTAN: English teacher Samuel Isaiah's journey in the Global Teacher Prize 2020 award may have come to an end but the 33-year-old believes his mission to bring change to Malaysia's Orang Asli children is far from over.

Isaiah, who was among the top 10 finalists for the prestigious award, yesterday lost out to Ranjitsinh Disale from India, who was announced as the winner of the Global Teacher Prize 2020.

In his winning speech, Disale announced that he would share half the prize money with his fellow Top 10 finalists, resulting in the other nine finalists receiving just over US\$55,000 each.

This is the first time in the Global Teacher Prize's six-year history that the winner has shared the prize money with other finalists.

The award ceremony, held virtually due to the Covid-19 pandemic, was hosted by renowned actor and comedian Stephen Fry at the Natural History Museum in London.

The finalists were selected from more than 12,000 applications and nominations from 140 countries around the world.

Isaiah said being selected as one of the finalists was already a major achievement as it gave him a golden opportunity to share his story about his Orang Asli pupils and their plight with the world.

The Universiti Utara Malaysia and Teachers Training Institute (Penang campus) graduate said the nomination had given him plenty of exposure and allowed him to see education from different perspectives.

"This journey started in July last year when I submitted the applications and essays. It has been memorable, especially making it into the Top 50 before being nominated in the Top 10 along with nine other outstanding educators from various parts of the world.

"I do not feel defeated. The win by Ranjitsinh (Disale) from India is a victory for education, children and all teachers out there, who have been going the extra mile to teach and make outstanding contributions to their profession," he told the *New Straits Times*.

Isaiah, who is pursuing a Master of Science in Educational Policy and Leadership at the State University of New York at Albany, New York, said he planned to return to Malaysia after completing his studies next year.

"I have been discussing with people to set up a foundation to help the Orang Asli and other Malaysian children. I want to look at ways how I can contribute more to the community and uplift education in the country.

"After spending eight years at SK Runchang (in Muadzam Shah), I was eager to further my



English teacher Samuel Isaiah watching the live streaming of the Global Teacher Prize 2020 award ceremony in London, at his home in Kuantan yesterday.

studies as I wanted to improve myself so that I can return and help the Orang Asli.

"It has been my dream for a long time and I want to make sure it becomes a reality by implementing the right policy, system and method."

Isaiah, who has been taking online classes after returning here from the United States in June due to the Covid-19 pandemic, expressed his gratitude to Malaysians from all walks of life who have been supportive and provided him with encouragement.

"When I was shortlisted as one of the Top 10 finalists, Malaysians living here and abroad came to-

gether to cheer me on.

"I'm completely overwhelmed by the attention and support.

"Although I was not named as the winner, I hope my achievement gave Malaysians a reason to smile during the dark times of the Covid-19 pandemic."

Isaiah, who taught Orang Asli pupils at SK Runchang since 2012, worked hard to change the negative perceptions of his pupils with his unique methods of teaching English, which saw the passing rate for the subject improve from 30 per cent to 85 per cent.

Fondly known as "Teacher Sam" to his pupils, he travelled 200km daily to school and in-

roduced the *sekolah pokok* (tree school), where he would go to the Runchang Orang Asli settlement twice a week after school hours to conduct English lessons under trees.

In March, Isaiah was named among the Top 50 finalists of the prestigious Global Teacher Prize 2020 before making it into the Top 10 in October.

Yang di-Pertuan Agong Al-Sultan Abdullah Ri'ayatuddin Al-Mustafa Billah Shah congratulated Isaiah for being in the Top 10, saying that his achievement and commitment would be a source of inspiration and example to all Malaysians. **Reporting by T.N. Alagesh**